

Feltman: Election Results Will Shape U.S. Policy Towards Lebanon

Contributed by Naharnet, CRNews
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Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman stressed Tuesday that U.S. support for Lebanon depends on election results, adding that the upcoming polls will "offer an opportunity for moderate voices" to reinforce the country's independence.

The June 7 polls "provide an opportunity to continue the process of reinforcing Lebanon's independence and work to deepen Lebanon's democratic institutions," Feltman told the House Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia during a hearing.

He also said "the elections offer an opportunity for moderate voices within Lebanon to continue their support for a sovereign, stable and independent Lebanon."

Feltman stressed that decisions on the shape and composition of the next government can and should be made by the Lebanese themselves, adding that U.S. assistance to Lebanon will be evaluated following the elections.

"We anticipate that the shape of the United States' assistance programs in Lebanon will be evaluated in the context of Lebanon's parliamentary election results and the policies formed by the new cabinet," he said.

The former U.S. ambassador to Lebanon lauded the March 2 National Dialogue communiqué in which Lebanese leaders called for all parties to refrain from violence and create a positive atmosphere ahead of the elections.

He told the subcommittee headed by Gary Ackerman that the election results will hinge on a handful of seats, located primarily in Christian-dominated areas.

"How these Christian voters divide along March 14 or March 8 lines will determine who has the majority in the next parliament and the next cabinet," according to Feltman.

He reiterated that Hizbullah continues to receive weapons from Syria and Iran in violation of U.N. Security Council resolution 1701.

"Hizbullah clearly remains a danger to Lebanon and the region," Feltman stressed, adding that the Shiite group's "violent actions" against Lebanese citizens in May 2008 reveal that the party is a threat to peace and stability.

"Our longstanding policy remains in effect: should Hizbullah renounce terrorism—both in Lebanon and abroad—and submit to the rule of law and the authority of the Lebanese state, we would reconsider this status," he said in reference to Britain's decision to start contacts with the Shiite group's political wing.

Feltman also brought up the issue of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon that will try ex-Premier Rafik Hariri's suspected assassins.

The court "cannot be traded away or shackled as part of a regional political deal," he said.

Feltman turned to his recent visit to Lebanon and Syria with Dan Shapiro, Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the National Security Council, saying it was aimed at stressing that Lebanese elections should be held without interference.

"The institutions of the Lebanese state have been set back in motion and the yoke of Syria's dominance over Lebanon has been cast off. Lebanon must now take ownership of its own future," the diplomat said in his testimony.

"We will continue to seek full implementation of all U.N. Security Council resolutions on Lebanon and remain engaged with our partners in working toward this goal," he said.

Feltman pointed out that the Obama administration is also continuing efforts to strengthen Lebanese state institutions and to support the government's efforts to extend its authority throughout Lebanon.

On peace efforts in the region, Feltman said: "Lebanon will play a key role in the long-term effort to build lasting stability

and peace in the Middle East. So will its neighbor, Syria."

He added that the U.S. is ready to support any dialogue between Lebanon and Israel, hoping that the issue of the border village of Ghajar will be solved "as a demonstration that diplomacy, rather than Hizbullah's weapons, can best secure Lebanon's interests."

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<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&15A7FB1EEBCE71D5C225758300727AE3>

US House - Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs - Hearing on Lebanon

Friends of Lebanon - The Honorable Gary Ackerman (D-NY) and The Honorable Jeffery Feltman Testimony today in Congress on Lebanon.

Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
Gary L. Ackerman (D-NY), Chairman
Update on Lebanon

You are respectfully requested to attend the following open hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building.

Date Tuesday, March 24, 2009

Time 2:00 PM

Location Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building

witnesses The Honorable Jeffery D. Feltman

Acting Assistant Secretary

Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

U.S. Department of State

(Former United States Ambassador to Lebanon)

Note Witnesses may be added.

Update on Lebanon Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

Testimony:

- The Honorable Gary L. Ackerman,
- The Honorable Jeffery D. Feltman Webcast